Statement of Teaching Experience/Philosophy

Teaching Experience: University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Introduction to Cognitive Processes (Psy263)
Since arriving at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, I have been the course instructor every term (and each summer) for this second-year Introductory Cognition course. This course requires me to lecture twice weekly on both historical and current research in the field. I also hold weekly office hours, have developed an extensive online FAQ, and have developed study guides and sample multiple choice questions as learning tools for undergraduates. In addition, I am responsible for the organization and administration of the course and the creation of the multiple choice exams (two midterms, one final). Moreover, each term I have an optional lecture which is a graduate school information session, which I’ve designed for students as a starting point for students planning to apply for graduate study in the sciences.

Evaluations are summarized in attached materials

Introduction to Cognitive Processes (Psy263): Summer Independent Study
Each summer, I also teach Psy263 as a Summer Independent Study (correspondence) course. These students have access to all of the materials as students who take the course in class through the year but these students are evaluated differently since the correspondence nature of the course makes formal testing difficult. These students complete a number of homework assignments through the summer (with their best 8 counting towards their final mark) which consist of a number of content questions outlined in the course text. Students also have to complete online experimental demonstrations along with a written summary of the experiment (again, with their best 8 counting towards their final mark) so that they receive the hands on experience that in class students often receive. Finally, these students have to write an article summary and research proposal on one of the topics from the course. I am responsible for the creation and marking of all assignments.

Evaluations are not collected for SIS students

Cognitive Proseminar (Psy907)
Once a year, I teach this graduate seminar which covers a number of important current topics in Cognitive Psychology at a higher level than is covered in undergraduate classes (often through current readings as opposed to the lectures I provide in undergraduate classes). I choose the first 7 topics to be covered and then the students provide input into what they would like to cover in the second half of the course (which is important given that I have students from many departments outside of psychology and so specific interests differ from year to year as does the degree to which I need to provide background information). I provide a brief introductory lecture at the beginning of each class which is followed by a student presentation and subsequent discussion of the topic by all students. I am responsible for the selection of the articles each week, the introductory lecture, and controlling the discussion if it veers off topic. I am also responsible for marking student presentations, weekly thought papers, and a final research proposal.

Evaluations are summarized in attached materials

Attention and Performance (Psy466/966...previously Psy498/971)
Once a year, I teach this advanced level graduate seminar which covers current readings and research trends in the Attention and Performance literature. The course is also available to

graduate students interested in the topic. This course is similar to Psy907 (outlined above) with the exception of the fact that all topics are chosen by me (the focus of the course is more narrow than that for Psy907, which encompasses material from a variety of areas) and I provide a more structured lecture at the beginning of each class. As with Psy907, students give presentations which lead into a discussion
of the articles from the week. I am responsible for the selection of the articles each week, the introductory lecture, and controlling the discussion if it veers off topic. I am also responsible for marking student presentations, weekly thought papers, and a final research proposal.

**Evaluations are summarized in attached materials**

**Previous experience: Cognitive Processes (PSY309B)**
On two separate occasions (2006-2007 and summer 2007) I was the course instructor for this third-year Introductory Cognition course at the University of British Columbia. This position required me to give a series of weekly lectures on both historical and current research in the field. I was also responsible for the organization and administration of the course and the creation of four exams (three midterms, one final).

*Mean student evaluation: All things considered, performs effectively as a university teacher: (6.2 out of 7)*

**Current Issues in Memory & Cognition (PSYD50)**
In the winter of 2004, I was the course instructor for this fourth year seminar course at the University of Toronto at Scarborough. This position required me to lead weekly seminar discussions on a variety of contemporary issues in cognitive research. I was responsible for the organization and administration of the course, and for the evaluation of all assignments (weekly thought papers, a major research paper/proposal, one oral presentation, seminar participation).

*Mean student evaluation: All things considered, performs effectively as a university teacher: (6.1 out of 7)*

**Human Memory (PSY372)**
On three separate occasions (Summer 2002, Summer 2003, Fall 2003), I served as instructor for this third-year advanced topics course in human memory at the University of Toronto. This position required me to give a series of lectures (twice a week in the summer, once a week in the fall) on both historical and current research in the field. I was also responsible for the organization and administration of the course, the creation of a final exam, and the grading of a major research proposal.

*Mean student evaluation: All things considered, performs effectively as a university teacher: (6.4 out of 7)*

**Teaching Philosophy**

I firmly believe that classroom instruction in psychology is of paramount importance to students who intend to pursue psychological research. Indeed, even for those who do not intend to pursue psychology beyond their introductory course, I see it as important to provide them with a strong background of basic psychological principles given the relevance of psychology to our everyday lives. Although there is no substitute for actual “on-the-job” research training, my view is that a strong background in historical and contemporary psychological research is a necessary precursor to designing, implementing, analyzing, and thinking practically about one’s own studies. Consequently, I view teaching as one of a professor’s most important responsibilities, not as a “bothersome sidebar” to doing research. Thus, I put a very considerable amount of time into designing courses that are both fun and informative for all involved. I enjoy teaching.

My teaching style reflects my belief that students learn best in a structured environment with a variety of interactive elements and a number of broad examples. I provide my students with clear expectations as to what I expect them to get out of my courses and how they will be evaluated. Moreover, I always go the “extra mile” to find humorous and/or entertaining examples of psychological phenomena as I believe this facilitates learning and makes even the most difficult material accessible to all.

I have had excellent feedback from students in this regard, with many students commenting that I was able to make “boring” subjects more interesting to them and that I had enhanced their desire to learn the material. Moreover, I view the teaching process as a learning experience not just for the students, but also for myself, and as such am very open to student feedback as to how a course could be structured in a more interesting or worthwhile way. When an instructor is rigid and closed to suggestion, I think it is to the detriment of both the students and the instructor.
It is also worth noting that as the desire to attend graduate school has greatly increased for current undergraduates, I have incorporated graduate school education into my Introduction to Cognitive Processes course. Once a term I hold an optional graduate school information session for interested students in which I go through everything they need to know about applying to graduate school in scientific disciplines such as psychology. I feel this is important as university level sessions can sometimes be too broad and many students have expressed to me an initial confusion regarding how to start researching the graduate school process. I offer students who attend the option to send me their personal statements and application materials at any time and I will provide them feedback. Usually only about 1/10th of the class take me up on this session and offer but those who have attended have expressed a lot of appreciation that I was willing to provide them a first step in the process.

In addition to more introductory courses (I teach Introduction to Cognitive Processes every term), I also teach an advanced undergraduate course in Attention and Performance and a Graduate Cognitive Proseminar once each year. My approach to these courses is different than that for Cognitive Processes. The goal of my graduate course is to provide the necessary introductory background to cognition for those that need it (the students always have diverse backgrounds) through short introductory lectures at the beginning of each class. Beyond that, however, I think graduate courses are more valuable if students are reading current articles, discussing them, and thinking of follow up questions that are relevant to future research. To that end, I organize my graduate classes as seminars, where students read a variety of short articles each week and post discussion questions to an online forum before class. There is one additional article each week that only one student reads and presents at the beginning of class, which leads to a discussion of the other related articles. This format has proven especially effective for students as it allows discussion to go off in a number of different directions and explore a number of unique topics/issues given the looser structure of the class. Moreover, for graduate classes, I only map out the first half of the course each term (so that we cover the 7-8 topics I think are most critical to discuss) and then we cumulatively decide on the remaining topics on day one. This allows me to cover issues that might be of interest to some students one year that would not be relevant in other years. Moreover, it allows me to take advantage of the usually diverse makeup of the class as I have students from many different backgrounds and this format allows them to select topics relevant to their area of expertise. My advanced undergraduate seminar (Attention and Performance) operates in the same way with the exception that I choose all of the topics and we have smaller discussion groups that lead into a later large discussion of experimental ideas. By running the course as a seminar it provides students the opportunity to take their studies to the next level (rather than using the same lecture and exam structure of first and second year courses) and read and comment on research in a manner that will prepare those with graduate school aspirations for the rigors of grad school while providing a unique opportunity for critical thinking for those who do not intend to pursue graduate study.

Outside of the classroom, my active research program affords both graduate and undergraduate students the opportunity to carry out research projects under my supervision. I see the one-on-one mentoring process with students as critically important to their development, and I very much welcome the opportunity to serve as a mentor for interested students. Given that my research encompasses a number of areas of cognition (eye movements, visual attention, perception, human memory), I am qualified to supervise students in several research areas and given that I am the most active cognitive researcher at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (which has a small cognitive group), I always make it a point to take on any and all volunteers looking to obtain research experience with me. My lab provides many opportunities for students to work both with me, and with their peers, in a number of larger scale projects, which benefits all involved. I am happiest in a lively and active lab where everyone collaborates. In addition, I organize and am a member of numerous reading groups and brownbag sessions given that these opportunities afford students a relaxed environment in which to critically discuss research, present ideas both formally and informally to other students and faculty, and generate research ideas for collaborative projects. These groups are open to all interested students but not required of anyone so it benefits motivated individuals without excluding unmotivated individuals. I have received a great deal of positive feedback from students for these efforts and as such, I was awarded the faculty member of the year award in 2009 (which is voted on by undergraduate psychology majors), which was a nice recognition of the extra work I put into helping students in any way I can. More
recently, I also received a College Distinguished Teacher award from the College of Arts and Sciences after being nominated by my department. The entire college (which consists of 19 departments) only awards up to six such awards a year and my department had traditionally nominated more senior faculty so it was a tremendous honor to be nominated for such a prestigious award this early on in my career.

Finally, it is important to note that my supervisory style outside of the classroom is unique in that I tailor my style to each individual student rather than adopting a single style for all. During my graduate school tenure I witnessed many talented students struggle with their research program because the supervision that they required was not what they were getting from their mentor (as an example, one of my advisors was very hands off, which worked well for me but created problems for another student who was exceptionally talented but had a greater need for deadlines and meetings to motivate her). As a consequence, I am flexible with how I supervise. All of the students in the lab are told up front what is expected of them and what they need to know (both practically and ethically) to work in the lab. Beyond that, however, students are encouraged to explicitly inform me of the environment that best suits their needs. Students who are motivated and independent are free to carry-out research and contact me only when necessary whereas anyone requiring more hands-on supervision or deadlines are encouraged to schedule meetings with me as much as they need. Most importantly, however, I always make sure to visit students in the lab as much as possible each day, as some of the best mentoring/advice is grown out of casual conversations and questions that arise in the moment. I am very dedicated to mentoring students to the best of my ability, such that they get as much out of the lab as they put in.

**Student Supervision Summary**

In my five years at UNL, I have supervised many students in a variety of capacities. This would range from volunteers, to students contracting Psy263 for honors, to UCARE students, to thesis students, and graduate students. The only aspect of my supervision that I would like to improve upon is the frequency with which I hold regular lab meetings. With so many students it has been difficult to find a time that works for even the majority of individuals. This ends up being problematic because I deal with redundant issues quite regularly with individual students and occasionally I do not have contact with my volunteers as often as I like (I stop by the lab a few times a day but for those who run during times I teach or in the evenings I do not have as much contact as I'd like). Everyone knows my door is open to them at any time but this is an issue that I would like to work out in the future.

Number of undergraduate volunteers (including those contracting 263 for honors), 2007 – present: 72

Number of undergraduate thesis students: 10


Number of UCARE students: 14


Undergraduate mentoring success:

Kristin Divis (Jensen award recipient for best undergraduate thesis and current University of Illinois graduate student); Alex Knezevic (accepted into medical school at UNMC beginning fall 2011); Scott MacLean (University of Delaware graduate student); Noah Weiss (Northwestern University graduate student), Jordan Grubaugh (University of North Carolina – Greensboro graduate student), Arianne Holland (University of Nebraska – Omaha graduate student), Sarah Burghaus (University of Southern Mississippi graduate student),

Graduate student research supervision/collaboration: 13

Mark Mills, Gerald McDonnell, Leslie McCuller, Vanessa Roof, Justin Coleman, Silvina Salvi, Suzi Singh, Ani Ahornian, Cindy Laub, Renu Thomas, Kate Walsh, Mike Gruszczynski, Tim Reilly

Graduate student committees (past and present): 21

Mark Mills, Gerald McDonnell, Leslie McCuller, Vanessa Roof, Justin Coleman, Suzi Singh, Silvina Salvi, Jessica Snowden, Krista Highland, Tim Emge, Ani Ahornian, Kathleen Kelsey, Renu Thomas, Hayden Bottoms, Kristen Anderson, Tim Reilly (Marketing), Rebecca Powell (Sociology), Mike Gruszczynski (Political Science), Pingyu Zhang (Computer Science and Engineering), James Crowe (Engineering), Justin Rousek (Engineering)

Ratings that were provided for me as part of the graduate student feedback process can be found in the Graduate Student Feedback folder in my tenure/promotion box